

Public Digital Art and Publics: The Case of *Hotel Yeoville* (2010)

Londiwe Langa

Student No: 0410943y

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of
Witwatersrand,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Digital Arts (Interactive Media)

Supervisor: Rory Bester
Co-Supervisor : Nontobeko Ntombela

Johannesburg

July 2014

Abstract

This research looks at the *Hotel Yeoville* (2010) public digital art project and offers an analysis towards understanding how through this creative intervention a public discourse can be inclusive of marginalised African immigrant groups living in South Africa. The marginal status of African immigrant groups in South Africa, is consistently similar in the digital arts field where there is no evident critique of the public art methods employed by art practitioners in engaging these marginalised groups. The agenda of *Hotel Yeoville* was particularly an attempt to counter the marginalising brutal and muted representations of these groups in mainstream media. In order for this creative intervention to effect such change, its public element needed to display a public vibrancy that was inclusive of the pluralistic opinions and voices of the African immigrant groups. However this public art project revealed paradoxes and complexities that are at the core of public art practise, and also highlighted the ambivalence of a strong creative product with an uncertain public-ness.

Declaration

I declare that this Research Report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Londiwe Langa

1st of July, 2014

Table of contents

Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Table of contents	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction	1
Purpose of the study	5
Methodology	7
Chapter summaries	8
Chapter 1: Strategies of engagement in <i>Hotel Yeoville</i>	11
1.1 The inception of <i>Hotel Yeoville</i>	12
1.1.1 Purpose of project	13
1.2 The history of the Yeoville suburb	15
1.3 Location of <i>Hotel Yeoville</i>	18
1.3.1 Location and nationality	19
1.4 Capturing the transit nature of Yeoville	26
1.4.1 Capturing narratives	28
1.4.2 Narratives in public art	30
1.5 Addressing the misrepresentation of African immigrants	31
Chapter 2: A public in the making	32
2.1 Who is the <i>Hotel Yeoville</i> public?	33
2.2 The importance of Self in a self-organised public	35
2.2.1 Public art founded on an anti-public history	40
2.3 Orchestrating strangers	42
2.4 When a public is beyond Strange	44
2.4.1 Networks among strangers that migrate	46
2.4.2 Strangers in virtual space	48
Chapter 3: Public discourse and the formation of an 'Us' in <i>Hotel Yeoville</i>	53
3.1 A public is 'Us' and 'I'	53
3.1.1 When art engages the 'Us' in a public	54
3.1.2 Public art stemming from an individual	55
3.2 Attention captures or repels	57

3.3 The public creating a social space to form a politic	59
3.4 The politic of a public is in the punctuality of discourse	64
3.4.1 The political presence of Technology	68
3.5 A public making sense of its poetic world making	72
3.6 The counterpublic of Yeoville in <i>Hotel Yeoville</i> (2010)	73
Conclusion	75
Bibliography	78
Filmography	79
Exhibitions	79
Appendix	80

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this research to my late father Siyabonga Langa and my mother Judith Langa for the endless support, love and encouragement they have devoted to me throughout my academic career. To my father, you inspired a spirit of intellectual curiosity and tenacity, for that I am eternally grateful.